



Sir Arnold Lunn

**Mountaineer
of
Faith**



Sir Arnold Lunn

Mountaineer of Faith

By:

Karl G. Schmude

Cover and Other Art: The Swiss Alps and cloud photographs used throughout this document are in the Public Domain, as are all other images within the document.



EARLY DAYS

On his seventieth birthday, Sir Arnold Lunn returned to the great Alps of Switzerland where the memories of his long life had been so often enriched. Landing by plane just below the summit of one of the peaks, he determined to ski to the valley below.


It was a visit charged with reminiscence. From his early youth he had lived at frequent intervals amid the Alps, and little of enduring value in his life had not some kind of link with mountains. He was fond of echoing Ruskin's dictum that "the mountains of the earth are its natural cathedrals." Their dignity, their majesty, their imperishable beauty were decisive in awakening him to the existence of the supernatural—a spiritual world informing and transcending the world of matter.

His Father

Arnold Lunn was introduced to the mountains by his father, a Methodist lay preacher. Sir Henry Lunn was intensely interested in the cause of Christian unity. In 1892, he organized a conference in Switzerland to discuss reunion. This formed the beginnings of the Lunn travel business and created the opportunity for the young Lunn to develop intimate contact with the Alps.

The influence of Sir Henry upon his son's life and character was profound and permanent. The dominant theme of his life had been his devotion to Christ, and the tenacity of this devotion made a deep impression on Arnold. Sir Henry once described his own father in words that his son later assigned to him, "...each was "a friend of the poor without patronage and of the rich without subservience."

Sir Henry was serving as a medical missionary in Madras, India, when his son, the first of four children, was born on 18 April 1888. He relates in his autobiography how Arnold almost died from fever several months after his birth, and indeed the collapse of Sir Henry's health some time later forced the early return of the whole family to England.



In 1902, Arnold was enrolled in the prestigious school of Harrow. His first important book, *The Harrovians* (1913), derived from his experiences there and became the first of a new literary genre—the realistic school story. At that time, the public school system was accepted as an undeniable part of the English way of life and no effective criticism of its rules and rituals had been voiced until Lunn’s novel appeared. The book was a best seller and did much to establish its author’s literary reputation.

The Agnostic

During his school years, Lunn abandoned Christianity and lapsed into agnosticism. He had been raised as an Anglican, but his faith languished under the severe Puritanism of his mother (the daughter of an Irish protestant clergyman) and the character of his father’s Christianity, which was, despite its fervor, principally a Christianity of experience and faith unsupported by reason. These influences left Lunn with the impression that religion was essentially irrational and his experiences at Harrow did nothing to modify this attitude. Not only did he fail to hear a reasoned case for Christianity, but he was also not given to suspect that such a case exists.

His real religion at this time, as he later confessed, was “an idolatry of sorts—mountain worship,” and he was “in reality . . . a quasi-pagan with a Christian veneer.”

He might well have endorsed Pascal’s comment that “there are perfections in Nature which demonstrate that she is the image of God,” without noting the counterbalancing statement that Nature has “imperfections, to assure us that she is no more than His image.”

At Oxford

In 1907, Lunn entered Balliol College, Oxford. In his first year, he encountered Hilaire Belloc’s classic work, *The Path to Rome* (1902). No Catholic writer was to have a greater influence on Lunn’s future conversion to Catholicism than Belloc. For the first time he was struck by the insistence that reason formed the foundation of faith. From

being a religion involving blind credulity, Catholicism now appeared as a creed founded on reason. Moreover, he was inspired by Belloc's vision of the Faith as the vitalizing root of Europe, and he began dimly to see that Catholicism was an integral part of Western culture.

Lunn always cherished the warmest memories of this period at Oxford. He served as Secretary of the Union and editor of *Isis*, the undergraduates' journal, and the very aspect of the university, "whispering from her towers the last enchantments of the Middle Ages," never failed to enliven his sense of beauty. Indeed, the view of Oxford's noble spires held for him an appeal comparable with the distant view of the Swiss Alps.



THE LONG JOURNEY

It was in the Alps that Lunn began his long journey to the Catholic Church, for it was there that his belief in the supernatural was revived.

"I was 19 at the time," he recalled. "We were resting on our descent from an interesting climb, on an alpine pass a few thousand feet above the valley, still beautiful in the fading alpine twilight. Sixty miles of peak and glacier saluted the setting sun. Suddenly I found myself asking whether matter alone, matter in the form of rock, ice and snow, could evoke the adoration which these mountains evoked in me."

To a mind pervaded by materialism, this experience was distinctly unsettling. Could science, he began to wonder, for all its power of interpretation, offer any rational explanation of the awe that now seized him? Could a physical explanation account for what seemed to be a spiritual experience? He grew increasingly dubious.

Lunn's first books drew upon his early acquaintance with the mountains. In 1912, he edited a volume of Oxford Mountaineering Essays as well as produced a portrait of *The Englishman in the Alps*. Under his stimulus, the town of Murren (where he lived when in Switzerland) became a popular center for winter sports, in particular the new sport of ski racing in which his influence was of decisive effect.

A Ski Pioneer

Lunn was, in fact, a ski pioneer, for he invented the modern downhill slalom race and obtained Olympic recognition for it in the 1936 Games. At the age of 10, he was already skiing and, before long, touring the mountain ranges on skis. In January 1909, he traversed the Bernese Alps from end to end, recording thereby the first large-scale ski mountaineering expedition by an Englishman. He climbed the Monch (13,468 ft.), the Monte Rosa (15,203 ft.), and the great Matterhorn (14,678 ft.), and made the first ski ascent of many peaks, among them the Eiger (13,042 ft.) in 1924. More than twenty books on skiing and mountaineering flowed from his lively pen. His volume, *Alpine Skiing* (1921), laid the foundation of modern snow and avalanche craft and demonstrated that he was a leading authority on mountains. His fame was once amusingly reflected in a Swiss paper's designation of him as "the Ski Pope!"



Yet, it is proof of his invincible courage that the mountaineering and skiing triumphs that he recorded throughout his life should have occurred despite a severe physical handicap. In August 1909, he fell whilst mountain climbing in North Wales, a result of which he developed one leg, two inches shorter than the other and an open wound that took eleven years to heal. The energy and tenacity of will that he exhibited in these circumstances were soon to show themselves in his pursuit and profession of religious truth.

His son, Peter Lunn, captained the English ski team in the 1936 Winter Olympics.



The Path to Rome

Although the promptings of emotion had disposed Lunn to belief in God, it was the findings of reason that set him upon the path to Rome. His response to an Alpine sunset was not, he thought, evidence of truth but it did serve as a signpost pointing to truth. “These moments of spiritual intuition,” he later wrote, “are valuable because they encourage one to continue one’s search for the objective arguments which are independent of personal intuition.”

In 1918, Monsignor Ronald Knox traced his own conversion to Catholicism in, “*The Spiritual Aeneid*,” and Lunn wrote a long and critical essay on the work. It betrayed both his fascination of, and exasperation at, a Church that seemed committed to “fantastic and irrational doctrines and yet continues to make converts among men distinguished not only for intellectual gifts but also for intellectual integrity.”

Such was the genesis of “*Roman Converts*” (1924), a study of five eminent converts—Newman, Manning, Tyrrell, Chesterton, and Ronald Knox. Lunn spent three years writing this book—a task that required him to make a detailed investigation into Catholic theology and apologetics.

Reason and Faith

One significant result of the study was Lunn's realization that Catholics did not, as he had formerly assumed, appeal from reason to faith in support of their claims. Only after one has proved the credentials of the Church by reason, Lunn discovered, is one asked to accept on its authority doctrines that one has no independent means of verifying. The classic argument for Catholicism, observed Lunn, scrupulously avoids any appeal to personal intuitions about the nature of ultimate reality—any appeal to subjective experiences that are incommunicable. On the contrary, the argument for Catholicism is essentially rationalistic, in that it relies upon objective and indisputable facts of everyday experience; such as the fact that “some things are in motion,” which was the starting point of Saint Thomas Aquinas's five proofs of the existence of God.

This approach to truth appealed irresistibly to Lunn's mind.

“Temperamentally,” he confessed, “I am a skeptic and am uninterested in creeds that cannot justify themselves at the bar of reason.”

The prospect of a religion being subjectively satisfying but not defensible in rational terms never had any appeal for him. He was, in Evelyn Waugh's words, “restlessly reasonable,” and, in his search for truth, he pronounced himself “an impenitent rationalist.” He was disconcerted by the intense subjectivism of our age and he invented a term, “fif” (meaning “funny internal feeling”) to characterize the criterion now commonly used to evaluate truth and actions. If truth is attainable, he thought, it must be objectively justifiable, and not prey to changing whims and dyspeptic moods. When he later engaged in correspondence with Monsignor Ronald Knox, he readily conceded Knox's assertion that “a system of doctrine which is for all minds must, somewhere, override the prejudices of some minds.”

In 1930, Lunn had occasion to elaborate his views on the importance of reason by examining its abandonment in the domain of popular science. *The Flight from Reason* was the first of his many attacks, not on science itself, but on scientific materialism—on the common assumption that science points inevitably to materialism and that life can be explained solely in terms of material processes. There is no allowance for the operation of spiritual forces, since the existence of the supernatural has been

peremptorily rejected. Thus, scientific enquiry, which should be genuinely open to all species of evidence, has been vitiated in the past century by the closed-minded insistence on a materialistic concept of the universe.

The Failure of Materialism

Lunn demonstrated that a belief in God, far from leading to conflict with science, is actually a principle that science requires for its own completion and justification. For materialism is finally a philosophy of nihilism: it ends by questioning the very basis of its own existence.


If materialism is true, Lunn argued, our thoughts are the mere by-product of material processes uninfluenced by reason. They are, therefore, determined by irrational processes and the thoughts that lead to the conclusion that materialism is right have no relation to reason.

In consequence, modern prophets like Marx and Freud have undermined their own systems of thought; they have been busily engaged in sawing away the branches on which they were sitting, for they have done no less than provide their disciples with reasons for rejecting all philosophies, including the ones they themselves formulated.

After an interval of twenty years, Lunn revised and enlarged this work, assigning it the title, *The Revolt against Reason* (1950). What began as a fear and impatience of reason had now, in Lunn's judgment, become a positive cult of unreason. The siege had ended in dethronement and the outcome has been mental anarchy.

“Difficulties”

In the same year as *The Flight from Reason* appeared, (1930), Lunn began an exchange of controversial letters on Catholicism with Monsignor Ronald Knox. In 1932, they were published in a joint volume called *Difficulties*. Lunn conceded at the outset the intrinsic plausibility of the Catholic claims—namely, that Christ would not have left the world without establishing some institution to preserve and proclaim his teaching.



Lunn's "difficulties" arose, however, when this expectation was tested in the light of history. The letters ranged over a multitude of thorny questions, both historical and philosophical, from the Spanish Inquisition to Papal Infallibility. In later life, Lunn would remark that the Inquisition had probably done more to damage the cause of Catholicism than any other event. Yet he would also admit that he "became a Catholic in spite of Torquemada and remains a Catholic in spite of Arnold Lunn."

The debate with Knox and the distinction that must ever be maintained between Catholics and Catholicism. "I began to see," he told one interviewer many years later, "that black sheep do not prove the family motto false. They throw mud over it. But the letters still stand on the crest." Knox himself expressed this reality most pointedly when he remarked after his conversion to Catholicism in 1917, "Now I belong to the same Church as Judas Iscariot."

As is often the case with conversation, the exchange of letters did much to clarify Lunn's own mind. In his own words, he "entered the Church along the road of controversy and by the gate of reason." Even so, nearly two years were to elapse before he was received into the Catholic Church. During this period, he wished that the Church would accept "Associate Members" who were in general sympathy with its aims but without being prepared to pay the full subscription. He remained on the threshold, content to defend the Church from outside yet unwilling to join it.

"Is Christianity True?"

In 1932, Arnold accepted a challenge from the noted British philosopher, Cyril Joad, to discuss Christianity in a series of letters, which were published in the following year as, *Is Christianity True?* Like Lunn, Joad was raised as a Christian but had abandoned it in adolescence and he attacked Christianity on a wide variety of fronts. Lunn, for his part, was by now a believing Christian, if uncommitted to any particular confession, and thus at times during the debate he felt that he was talking to his former self.

In the preface, Joad commented on the degree of contemporary ignorance of Christian apologetics. “Professing Christians and militant skeptics alike are often ignorant of the most elementary facts concerning the Christian faith. They knew neither its history, its tenets, or the arguments with which it has been historically defended.”

Yet, Joad himself betrayed a disconcerting ignorance of these very facts and there was, as Lunn later observed in a reminiscence of him, hardly one popular misrepresentation of Catholicism that did not find its way into their correspondence.


Joad reminded Lunn of the character in Chesterton’s novel, *The Man Who Was Thursday* (1908), who knew all about Christianity because he had read it up in two works, *Religion the Vampire* and *Priests of Prey*.

The book inspired an enduring friendship between the two men and demonstrated that controversy and courtesy are compatible. Nowhere was the good-tempered atmosphere in which letters were exchanged more evident than in Joad’s last letter to Lunn. He stated, “You have been eloquent, alert, and amusing, and you have hit hard and clean. I respect your intelligence and I acknowledge an expert in the art of controversy. If at the end I am unable to respond to your general appeal, to give marks to Christianity rather than to yourself, you must comfort yourself with the reflection that, if your elder person argument counts for anything, I may one day come to share your present convictions, as I apparently now share your past doubts. If I do, you may well claim to have sown in my unconscious, since my conscious self disowns it, the seed of my future conversion.”

The remark was prophetic. Joad died an Anglo-Catholic, and he told Lunn that the seed of his conversion had indeed been sown by their friendly argument.

Changed Concerns

It is a sign of changed concerns—and of changed apologetics—that a comparable debate today would tend to revolve around the practical worth of Christianity rather than its dogmatic foundations, the value of the Christian way of life rather than the truth of the Christian Gospel. Contemporary man has been effectively secularized and his mind is not readily attuned to the intimations of the supernatural. His outlook is technological



rather than transcendental, concerned with a way of life rather than a why of life. When the aching emptiness of a life of materialism proves unbearable, man's spiritual searchings are liable to be intensely egocentric, guided more by personal experiences than by objective revelations.

Such a mental climate is not conducive to the appeals of reason—and, therefore, perhaps averse to a rational discussion on Christianity of the kind conducted by Lunn and Joad. Yet people will always exist whose approach to the Church is primarily rational, and who feel impelled, in the words of Saint Peter, to give “a reason of that hope which is in (them).” Such enquirers will always look to the truth of a thing more than its supposed relevance and embrace that truth even when it will prove demanding rather than reassuring.

Reason and Spirit


The main importance of argument in the process of conversion, Lunn believed, is that it helps to destroy the barriers that separate men from God; it undermines the prejudices that prevent the growth of faith. Though the operations of reason can themselves be clouded by prejudice and distorted by desire, the appeal of evidence, whether it is the evidence of logic or of fact, can ultimately prove irresistible.

Yet, if reason brought Lunn to the threshold of faith, it could not, he soon realized, compel him to cross it.

“Finally,” admitted Robert Bolt's Saint Thomas More (*A Man for All Seasons*) in his death-cell, “it isn't a matter of reason; finally it's a matter of love.”

In Lunn's eyes, the presence of saints in the Church was the clinching argument because their lives testified to a radiant love of God—a love that is not natural, in the strictest sense of the term, but supernatural.

“Holiness,” he later wrote, “is a force as real as electricity and like electricity can be recognized by certain results even in the material world.”



It was the power of sanctity that finally convinced Lunn that Catholicism is not merely rational but super-rational; that the source of its life lies beyond the reach of reason and is literally not of this world. In a renewed exchange between Monsignor Ronald Knox and Lunn almost two decades after their original debate, Knox remarked, “It was a good thing, I think, that you did not choose a more adroit opponent. It might have looked as if you were being battered, by sheer force of reasoning, into submission. In proportion as the reader is led to exclaim, ‘Fancy being convinced by arguments like that!’ he will perhaps be led to wonder whether it is, after all, entirely a matter of argument.” Lunn now realized that it was not. The sanctuary for which he had been searching loomed invitingly before him and it was a chance remark by Cardinal Newman that induced him to enter. “You must make a venture; faith is a venture before a man is a Catholic. You approach the Church in the way of reason; you enter it in the light of the spirit.”

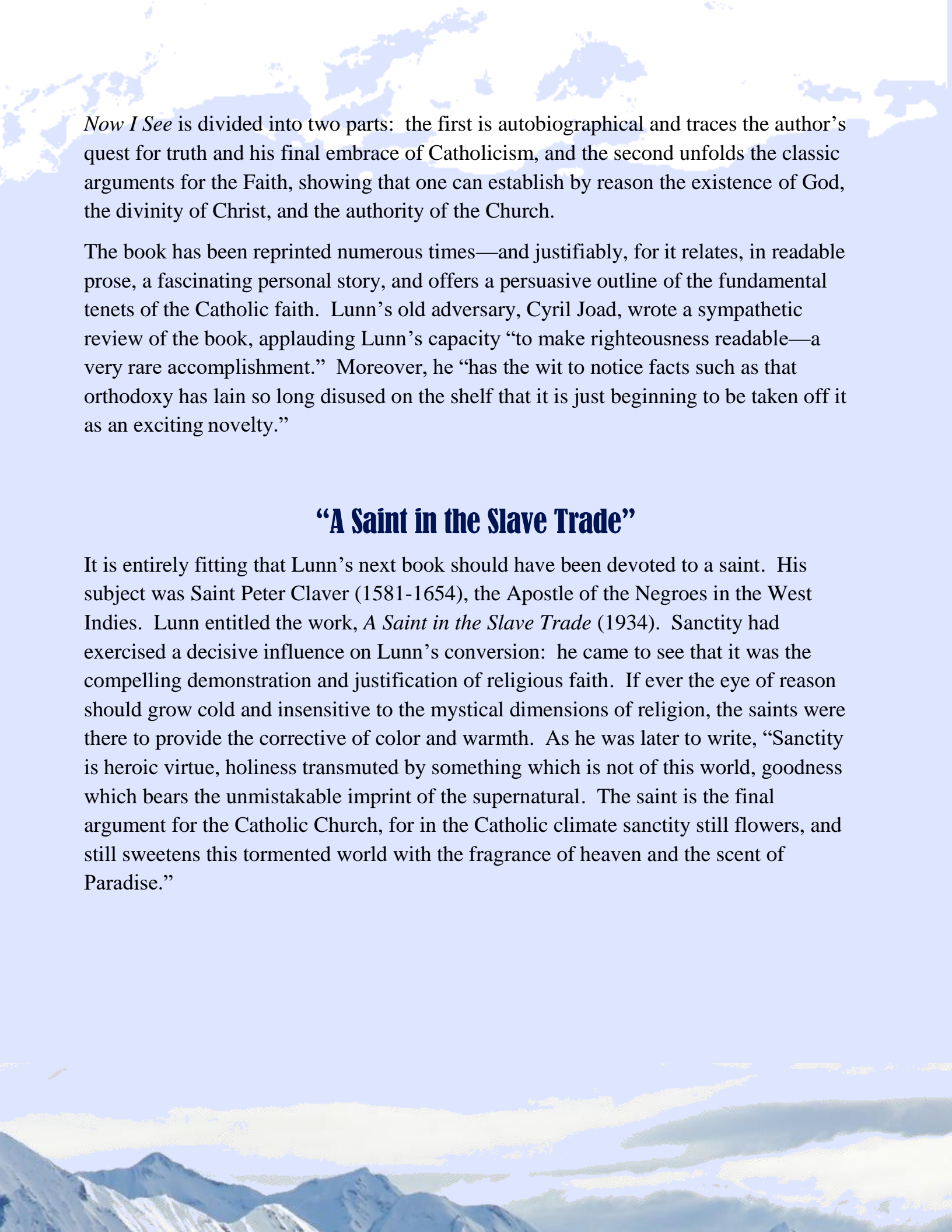
NOW I SEE

On 13 July 1933, Monsignor Knox received Lunn into the Church, unleashing thereby on a de-Christianized society one whom Evelyn Waugh called “the most tireless Catholic apologist of his generation.”

The story of Lunn’s conversion is related in *Now I See*, which was published in November of 1933. The title was taken from Saint John’s Gospel (9;25), “One thing I know, that whereas I was blind now I see.”

In later life, Lunn’s fame in the skiing world gave rise to confusion over the title, and he liked to recount the story of the man who bought *Now I See* to take to the Alps, opened it on the plane, and discovered to his horror that the title was not, as he had expected, *Now I Ski!*

In retrospect, Lunn felt grateful that his approach to Catholicism had followed the path it did. “I can imagine,” he said, “no better training for the Church than to spend, as I did, a year arguing the case against Catholicism with a Catholic, and a second year in defending the Catholic position against an agnostic.”



Now I See is divided into two parts: the first is autobiographical and traces the author's quest for truth and his final embrace of Catholicism, and the second unfolds the classic arguments for the Faith, showing that one can establish by reason the existence of God, the divinity of Christ, and the authority of the Church.

The book has been reprinted numerous times—and justifiably, for it relates, in readable prose, a fascinating personal story, and offers a persuasive outline of the fundamental tenets of the Catholic faith. Lunn's old adversary, Cyril Joad, wrote a sympathetic review of the book, applauding Lunn's capacity "to make righteousness readable—a very rare accomplishment." Moreover, he "has the wit to notice facts such as that orthodoxy has lain so long disused on the shelf that it is just beginning to be taken off it as an exciting novelty."

"A Saint in the Slave Trade"

It is entirely fitting that Lunn's next book should have been devoted to a saint. His subject was Saint Peter Claver (1581-1654), the Apostle of the Negroes in the West Indies. Lunn entitled the work, *A Saint in the Slave Trade* (1934). Sanctity had exercised a decisive influence on Lunn's conversion: he came to see that it was the compelling demonstration and justification of religious faith. If ever the eye of reason should grow cold and insensitive to the mystical dimensions of religion, the saints were there to provide the corrective of color and warmth. As he was later to write, "Sanctity is heroic virtue, holiness transmuted by something which is not of this world, goodness which bears the unmistakable imprint of the supernatural. The saint is the final argument for the Catholic Church, for in the Catholic climate sanctity still flowers, and still sweetens this tormented world with the fragrance of heaven and the scent of Paradise."

“Science and the Supernatural”

In 1931, Lunn had challenged the renowned scientist, Professor J. B. S. Haldane, to debate in book form *Science and the Supernatural*, and the ensuing exchange of letters extended over three years, culminating in publication in 1935. This was not the least tedious feature of the controversy, for it was marked also by an animosity uncharacteristic of most debates in which Lunn was involved.

The principal cause was that Haldane had expected Lunn to attack science, whereas Lunn had the profoundest respect for science. He had defended the scientific method in *The Flight from Reason*, but had a genial aversion to the ideology that Haldane professed—scientific materialism—“...the superstition that science has made it impossible to believe in the supernatural in general or in miracles in particular.” Haldane was disturbed by the attack upon his beliefs and his letters acquired an intemperance that soured the atmosphere in which the debate was conducted.

Nonetheless, the book itself had at least two worthwhile effects: it removed from the mind of Lord Longford, a subsequent convert to Catholicism, the suspicion that “in a real showdown there would be materialist questions the man of religion could not face;” and it helped to revive the faith of Lunn’s secretary (who later became his second wife), Phyllis Holt-Needham.

In 1913, Lunn had married Mabel Northcote, a woman of remarkable sensitivity and wit, and their marriage, which was blessed with three children, ended with Mabel’s death in 1959. Two years later he married his secretary—on his own birthday, as it happened, “so as to ensure,” his wife said to him, “a reasonable chance of your remembering our wedding date.”

Within That City

In 1936, Lunn paused to review the momentous step he had taken three years before in entering the Catholic Church. At the conclusion to *Now I See*, he had quoted one of his favorite passages—a moving depiction of the Church by Hilaire Belloc. Belloc stated, “There is a city full, as are all cities, of halt and maimed, blind and evil, and the rest; but


it is the city of God. There are not two such cities on earth. There is One. One thing in this world is different from all other. It has a personality and a force. It is recognized, and (when recognized) most violently loved or hated. It is the Catholic Church. Within that household, the human spirit has roof and hearth. Outside it, is the night.”

Lunn was now a member of that divine household; he was now *Within That City*, and this was the title he assigned to the book of discerning essays he wrote in 1936. The development he had experienced as a Catholic was reflected in one of the chapter headings, “Water into Wine,” in which he pointed out that his assent to the doctrines of the Church had now become real and not merely notional.

The transformation was well traced in a Vatican broadcast that Lunn made on 4 May 1951. Called “Rome through Three Spectacles,” the talk examined his impressions of Rome over several decades—first in 1929, when he saw the city through protestant spectacles; next in 1933, soon after he became a Catholic; and finally in 1950, as he was about to embark on a world lecture tour. The blending of the casual and the ostentatious, which characterizes the devotional practice of Continental Catholicism, at first disturbed Lunn, but he gradually came to see this as vivid evidence of a people at home in the House of God.

The Holy Year, 1950

Slowly, yet irresistibly, water was transformed into wine—“the water of uneasy conviction into the wine of unquestioning faith.” In 1950, he saw Rome indubitably through Catholic spectacles. He joined the unending procession of pilgrims through the basilicas that war had spared, and he felt most poignantly the sentiment of homecoming. He said at that time, “Nothing in my life as a Catholic has moved me more than those hours which I spent visiting the basilicas. Nothing has given me a greater sense of the universal nature of the Church than the stream of pilgrims of so many different countries and different races. And nothing has done more to reinforce the conviction which finally brought me into the Church that there is only one household in which the tormented spirit of man can find rest and certitude.”




Lunn's growing reputation as a Catholic advocate gave rise in 1936 to an invitation to teach apologetics at the University of Notre Dame in Indiana (USA). He gladly accepted and, for three successive years (1936-38), he spent one term as a visiting professor at the university. The experience enabled him to test certain apologetical techniques that he had developed, as well as to show them how inadequately Catholic students are equipped to defend their faith.

“The Third Day”

Lunn's basic method of teaching Christianity followed that which he had adopted in learning about it—namely, a rationalistic approach involving a study of the Resurrection as an historical miracle demonstrating the divinity of Christ. Lunn always asserted, with Saint Paul, that “if Christ has not risen, . . . then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain.” He regarded the Resurrection as the greatest of historical problems, and his own prolonged research into the event had played a crucial part in bringing him to the Church. In 1945, he produced his own study of the Resurrection, *The Third Day*, in which he subjected the evidence for the event to rigorous scrutiny, and answered the various objections that have been advanced against the Resurrection as the only convincing explanation for the Empty Tomb.

For the tomb in which Christ had been placed after the Crucifixion was, two days later, unquestionably empty. Even the enemies of Christianity had admitted it. Thus, either the body was stolen by the disciples, as the Pharisees maintained, or Christ had in fact risen from the dead. However, if the disciples had stolen the body, why would they have propagated what they knew to be a monstrous and unnecessary lie and endure death by martyrdom rather than recant? Moreover, it was belief in the Resurrection that had converted the Apostles from terror-stricken defeatists into dynamic missionaries of Christ. The evidence for it, in fact, as Lunn showed, is overwhelming—and confirmed by the cumulative testimony of events like the proven occurrence of miracles throughout the ages.



Lunn's time at Notre Dame was both pleasant and fruitful. One of his students was responsible, humanly speaking, for bringing twelve converts into the Church in four years, and it was the sort of success that Lunn would later cite in the face of pleas that "argument gets you nowhere."

SAINTS AND SINNERS

At Notre Dame, Lunn was described by his colleagues as "the wandering journalist." He did, indeed, engage in an immense amount of traveling during the second half of the 1930's, most often in connection with the cause of the Spanish Civil War.

In 1937, the British Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain, suggested to the historian, Sir Arthur Bryant, that Lunn be asked to visit Spain and record his impressions in a book that would seek to restore balance to the discussion of a conflict that had proved deeply divisive, even in countries like Britain. In George Orwell's words, the Spanish Civil War was "above all things a political war," and on this account Lunn's book was to be circulated to every conservative member of the British Parliament.

The author spent several months at the Spanish front and the outcome was *Spanish Rehearsal* (1937), an eloquent defense of Franco's cause. It bore the unmistakable marks of the heat of battle, and the title reflected Lunn's belief that here was the grim rehearsal of a more destructive conflict. The tragedy of World War II was barely two years away.

Yet, in Lunn's view, the war had another, even more significant dimension: it was "only a phase in the recurring battle between the two rival interpretations of life, the spiritual and the materialistic." It was primarily in terms of Catholicism under assault from Communism that Lunn construed the conflict in Spain.

The Church in Spain

Without doubt, the spectacle of Spanish Catholicism had a profound impact on him. For the first time he saw the Church in action—a society that was impregnated with Catholic belief, and, though it might often have betrayed the ideals that flow from that belief, it had never abandoned its loyalty to the historic faith.


In face of national turmoil and the ever-present threat of martyrdom, this loyalty acquired the dimension of heroism. Lunn was deeply moved by the tenacity of the ordinary Spanish Catholic; a tenacity that was more a consecration than a commitment, and which Lunn had earlier perceived when he studied the first Apostles, who suffered death rather than renounce their faith in Christ. He was fond of quoting Pascal's comment, "I readily believe those witnesses who get their throats cut."

In 1938, Lunn returned briefly to Spain and celebrated Easter Sunday by attending High Mass in Seville Cathedral. He saw the Death and Resurrection of Christ reflected in the fortunes of Spain, and he was pierced with hope. "One loves Chartres," he said, "as Martha loved Lazarus before he died, but one loves Seville as Martha loved Lazarus after he had been raised from the dead."

The "Half-Christian"

In Spain Lunn encountered in its full force the phenomenon of the "half-Christian"—the person who professes belief in Christianity without being noticeably conscientious about practicing it. He was struck, for example, by the spectacle of Spaniards genuflecting to the altar before they proceeded to burn down the church. For a great many people, especially perhaps those who are not Catholics, this phenomenon is a tragic scandal that is difficult to reconcile with the claim of Catholicism to be the one and only true Church; for surely a cardinal mark of the true Church would be holiness.

Holiness has assuredly been one of the marks of the Catholic Church, as an illustrious gallery of saints throughout history attests. Yet, the Catholic Church is also catholic: it is universal and has been enjoined to bring all men to salvation—a mission forever symbolized by the outstretched arms of Christ on the Cross. The Church has never been



a society of the elect, of saints to the exclusion of sinners. It has embraced the respectable and the notorious, the brilliant and the mediocre, the powerful and the weak, the prosperous and the poor.

Lunn was profoundly attracted by the power of the Church, not only to inspire saints, but also to evoke the loyalty of sinners and to retain the allegiance of the naturally irreligious.

“The “half-Christian” is, indeed, a very useful member of society and, as long as he continues to form the backbone of a state, Christian ethics will not be challenged. Sinners will continue to sin, but they will, at least, have the decency to refrain from preaching what they practice—a much more serious offence than failing to practice what they preach. Lip service to Christian ideals is better than no service; platonic respect for the Christian code of morality is better than official contempt. Czarist Russia, which was officially Christian, was less corrupt, less immoral, and infinitely less degraded than Bolshevik Russia, which is officially atheistic.”

Modest of his own capacity to be a saint, Lunn was reassured as well as impressed by the evidence that the Church constituted of the merciful patience of God. He saw that it is “not only the nursery of saints, but a hospital for sinners,” and only a Church that could accommodate sinners—sinners who, admittedly, have kept alive the sense of sin—could find a place for Arnold Lunn.

During World War II, Lunn became friendly with a priest on board a ship sailing for Peru. The conversation turned to Saint Peter Claver, and the priest commended to Lunn an excellent book on the saint. However, he could not recollect its title.

Lunn asked, “Was it by any chance called, *A Saint in the Slave Trade*?”

“Yes, that’s it,” said the priest. “You should read it.” Then he added sternly, “It would do you good.”

“I dare say it would,” replied Lunn sadly, “if I didn’t know the author.”

Such knowledge, he was convinced, was sufficient to repel the favorably disposed reader. “I have, of course,” Lunn confessed, “learned by experience that my only hope

of retaining the respect of those who like my writings about the Faith is to insist that they remain pen-friends. Any slight influence that I might hope to exercise through my writings is promptly counteracted by my personal example.”

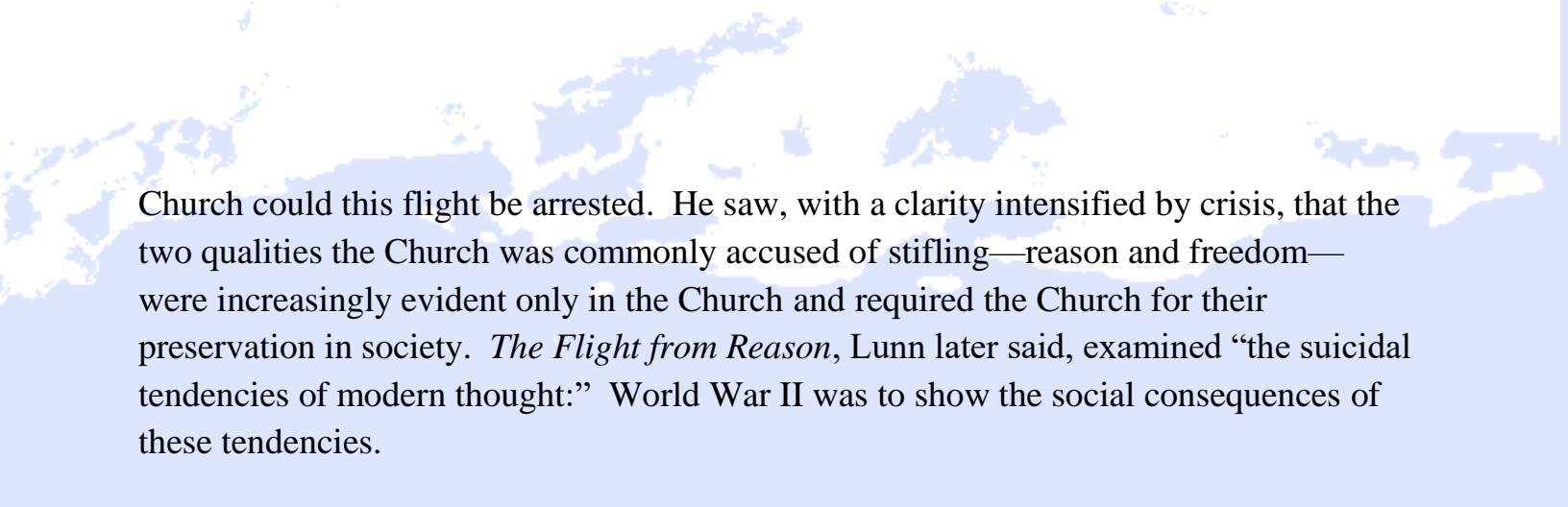
Such a disclaimer was not a sign of false modesty. Lunn was not without vanity—though even this was more the panache of the public performer than the pretentiousness of the egotist. Beneath the surface confidence lurked a genuine humility that manifested itself throughout his life. The capacity to laugh at oneself is one of the signs of humility, and it was a capacity Lunn possessed in salutary measure. When asked at the end of a lecture he gave in Sydney in 1950 what had been his approach to the confessional when he became a Catholic, he answered, “Slow and reluctant.”

Moreover, he was incurably absent minded. He had the habit of losing a large bag that contained the cylinders for his dictaphone. “We travel down together,” he said, “from Charing Cross, but whereas I get out at Chislehurst, my bag usually prefers to spend the night with friends at Sevenoaks. On the last occasion when my secretary applied at the Lost Luggage Office to reclaim the prodigal, the bored official in charge turned his head and asked the man behind him, “Is the Lunn bag in again this morning?”

“Communism and Socialism”

In 1939, the author published *Communism and Socialism*, which was a study of the twin threats to Western culture posed by Hitler and Stalin. Lunn believed that the dictators had much in common, for their regimes were aggressively totalitarian in their claims. In place of Christ, Hitler had exalted Race, and Stalin Class. The fruits of such idolatry were already tragically apparent.

The 1930’s were now drawing to their catastrophic close. They had been for Lunn, as for so many others, a decade of tumultuous drama; a time for searching and a time for believing; a time for judging and a time for acting. Lunn’s quest for truth had culminated in his conversion to Catholicism in 1933, and the intervening years had only served to reinforce his decision. He had begun the decade by recording *The Flight from Reason* (1930), and he was ending it with the growing conviction that only through the



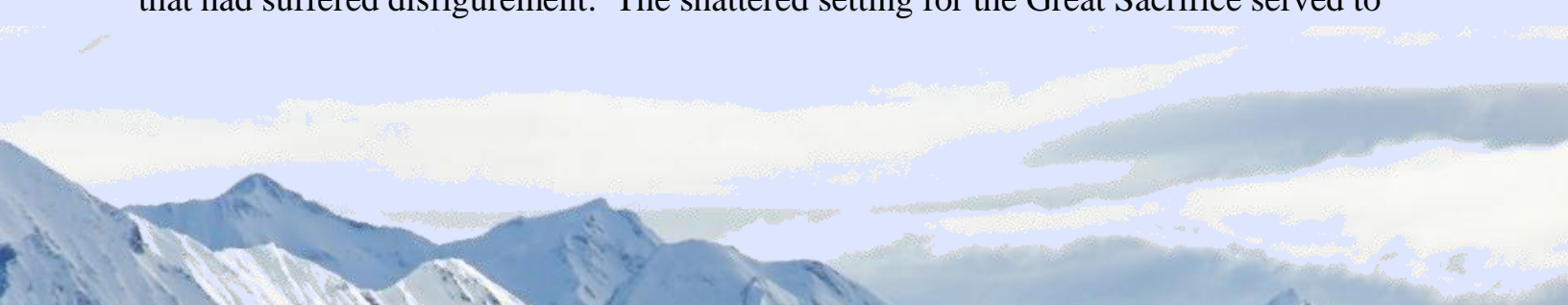
Church could this flight be arrested. He saw, with a clarity intensified by crisis, that the two qualities the Church was commonly accused of stifling—reason and freedom—were increasingly evident only in the Church and required the Church for their preservation in society. *The Flight from Reason*, Lunn later said, examined “the suicidal tendencies of modern thought.” World War II was to show the social consequences of these tendencies.

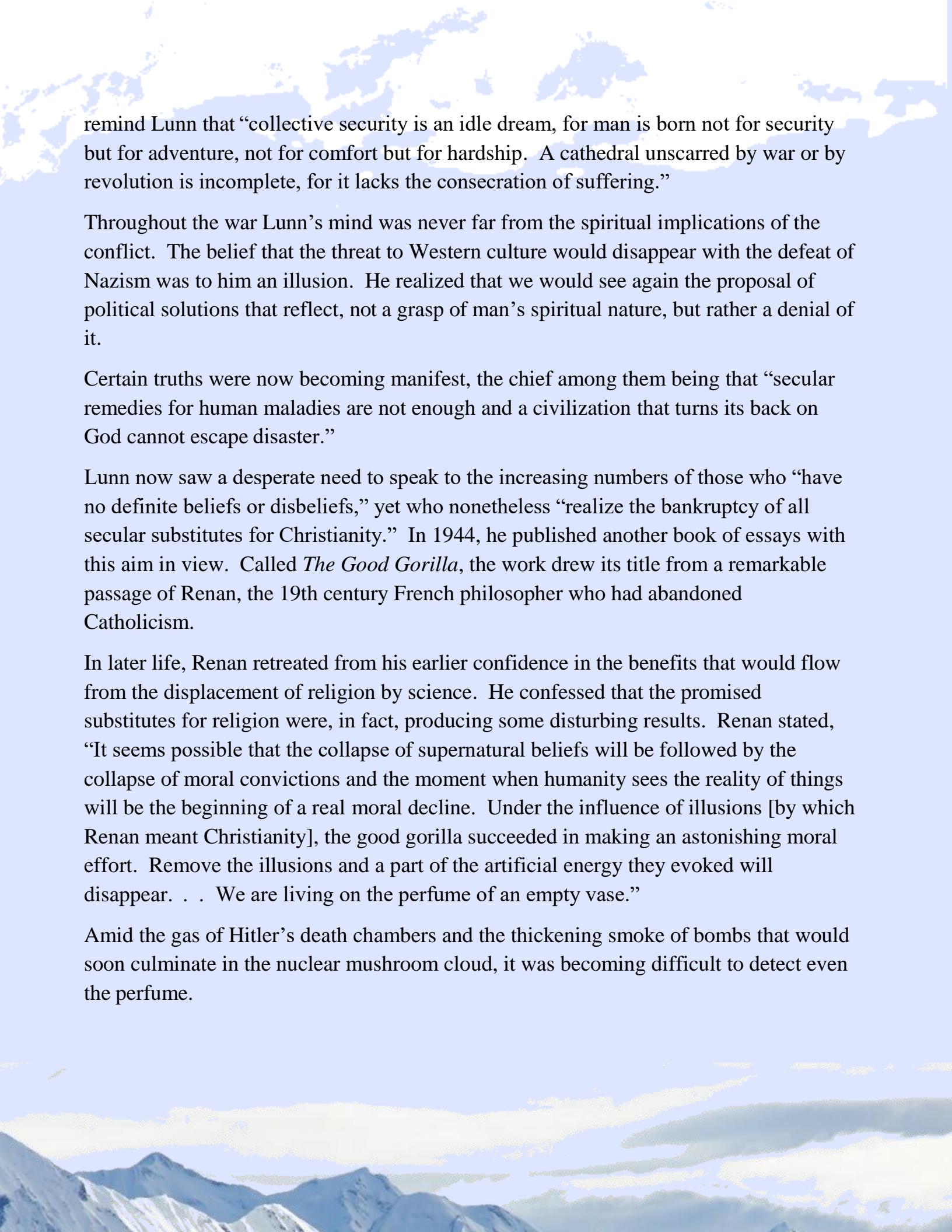
THE TRAVELER

In October of 1939, one month after the war began, Lunn left London for his much beloved Switzerland. The Alps now loomed more than ever as symbols of permanence in a crumbling world, and Lunn was enchanted to behold them again. From Switzerland, he set out on a European journey that took him through Yugoslavia, (generally known as Jugoslavia at that time), Hungary, Rumania, Bulgaria, Italy, and Malta. The impressions he gathered were embodied in *Whither Europe?* (1940). The future of Europe was a question of mounting concern and urgency as the continent was convulsed by war. Lunn was deeply European in outlook, and his breadth of experience, both intellectually and geographically, had convinced him of a truth to which Belloc had first alerted him—“Christianity is not only a creed but a culture,” and “the way of life which is the flower of Christianity would not survive the destruction of the Christian faith.”

During the next few years, Lunn continued his habit of extensive travel. In 1940, he visited Ireland as a special correspondent for the *London Tablet*, and soon after sailed to New York to begin a six-month tour of the United States. These and other wartime experiences were recorded in *And the Floods Came*; a chapter of wartime autobiography (1942).

When he returned to London in 1941, he saw the desolate effects of many months of air raids. He went to Mass with Douglas and Mia Woodruff in the almost-demolished Southwark Cathedral, and observed that the chief object of destruction had been the figure of Christ in the Stations of the Cross, for in many of them His was the only face that had suffered disfigurement. The shattered setting for the Great Sacrifice served to





remind Lunn that “collective security is an idle dream, for man is born not for security but for adventure, not for comfort but for hardship. A cathedral unscarred by war or by revolution is incomplete, for it lacks the consecration of suffering.”


Throughout the war Lunn’s mind was never far from the spiritual implications of the conflict. The belief that the threat to Western culture would disappear with the defeat of Nazism was to him an illusion. He realized that we would see again the proposal of political solutions that reflect, not a grasp of man’s spiritual nature, but rather a denial of it.

Certain truths were now becoming manifest, the chief among them being that “secular remedies for human maladies are not enough and a civilization that turns its back on God cannot escape disaster.”

Lunn now saw a desperate need to speak to the increasing numbers of those who “have no definite beliefs or disbeliefs,” yet who nonetheless “realize the bankruptcy of all secular substitutes for Christianity.” In 1944, he published another book of essays with this aim in view. Called *The Good Gorilla*, the work drew its title from a remarkable passage of Renan, the 19th century French philosopher who had abandoned Catholicism.

In later life, Renan retreated from his earlier confidence in the benefits that would flow from the displacement of religion by science. He confessed that the promised substitutes for religion were, in fact, producing some disturbing results. Renan stated, “It seems possible that the collapse of supernatural beliefs will be followed by the collapse of moral convictions and the moment when humanity sees the reality of things will be the beginning of a real moral decline. Under the influence of illusions [by which Renan meant Christianity], the good gorilla succeeded in making an astonishing moral effort. Remove the illusions and a part of the artificial energy they evoked will disappear. . . We are living on the perfume of an empty vase.”

Amid the gas of Hitler’s death chambers and the thickening smoke of bombs that would soon culminate in the nuclear mushroom cloud, it was becoming difficult to detect even the perfume.



In late 1943, Reverend John (now Cardinal) Heenan suggested that the well-known historian and inveterate opponent of Catholicism, Doctor G. G. Coulton, should debate with Arnold Lunn on the question, “*Is the Catholic Church anti-social?*” The debate, which lasted a year, was published under that title in 1947. Once again, it proved a tedious rather than stimulating exercise for Lunn. Doctor Coulton harbored a venomous hatred for the Church, and this injected a certain ill will into the debate, which Lunn’s gestures of courtesy could do little to soften.


Moreover, Coulton felt under no compulsion to keep to the point. In a correspondence in which the average letter was meant to be from 3,000 to 7,000 words in length, Coulton’s second letter stretched to 34,000 words, departing frequently from the stated subject of the debate—which was the social consequences of Catholicism and not the truth of Catholic doctrine. Such license was not supportable in an exchange in which both authors had agreed to confine their total word-length to 50,000!

Australian Visit

In August 1950, Lunn embarked upon a long lecturing journey that took him around the world. He spent six weeks in Australia, lecturing to various audiences in Melbourne, Perth, Adelaide, Canberra, and Sydney. “I have the happiest memories of Australia,” he later recalled, “and am sad that my hope to return there for another lecture tour was never realized.”

The Australian tour began in Melbourne, where Lunn delivered four major lectures. Archbishop Mannix, by that time 86 years old, was in attendance at each of them. The Archbishop hosted a lunch party in the author’s honor where Lunn expressed anxiety that the Archbishop might be overtaxing himself. He was enchanted by Archbishop Mannix’s smiling response. “When I get old, I really will have to start taking care of myself.”

Whilst in Melbourne, Lunn also engaged in a public debate with Glanville Cook, the Secretary of the Rationalist Society of Australia. Their subject was, “Is the Catholic Church intolerant and a bar to progress?”



Public Debates

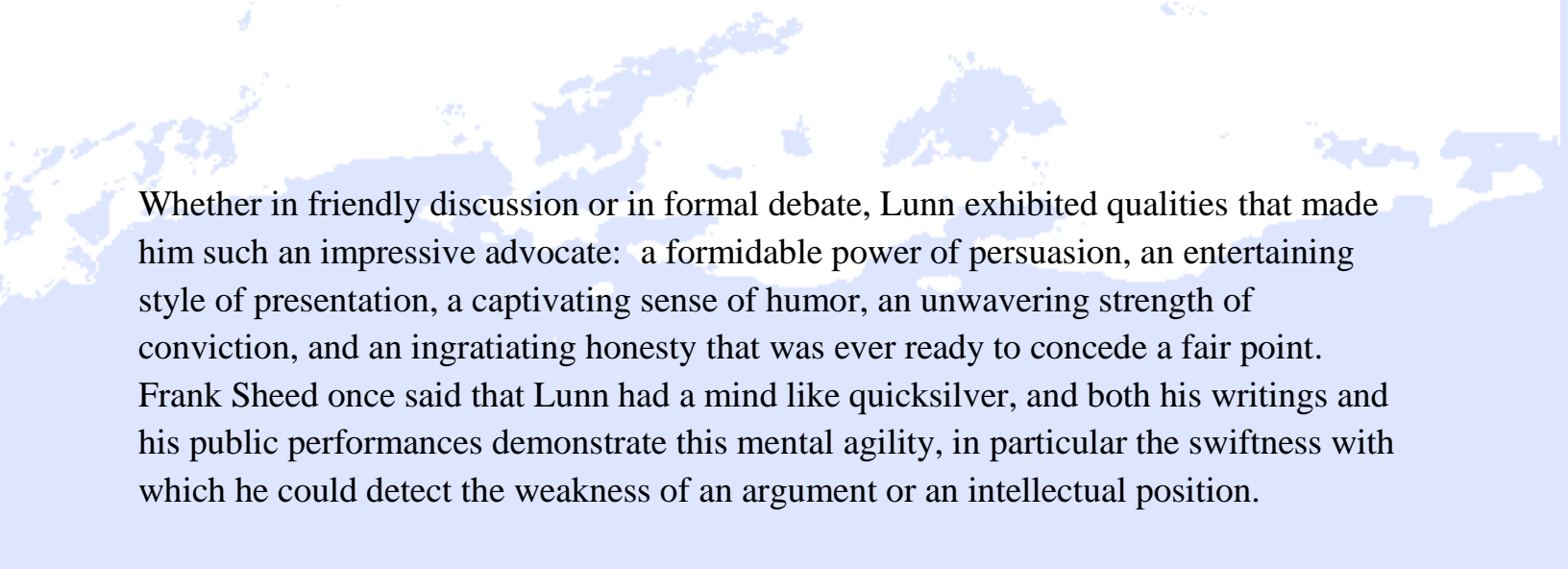
Lunn always believed that, as a means of communicating the truths of Catholicism to non-Catholics, debates are incomparably more effective than lectures. Debates tend to attract the unconverted who will rarely attend the formal lecture held under Catholic auspices. On this occasion, a vast hall at Melbourne University was crowded with students throughout the two-hour debate with Glanville Cook. The event proved so popular that it was later repeated in Melbourne.

Lunn's motto as a debater was Saint Augustine's precept, "Love men, slay errors." "Intolerance of error," Lunn pointed out, "must not be equated with intolerance of men in error." Controversy must not lead to quarrelling, and Lunn's tact and composure before this Australian university audience were highly impressive. Indeed, so poor a representative was he of the Church's alleged intolerance that Glanville Cook voiced the opinion that Lunn was not a typical Catholic.

"Some men," he remarked, "are better than their creeds"—a suggestion which amused Lunn hugely and prompted the reply that "no man was good enough to live up to the Catholic code or bad enough to live down to atheism."

After the debate, Vincent Buckley, at that time President of the Newman Society at Melbourne University, complimented Lunn on the "great tradition of intellectual chivalry" that he had left behind for them to emulate. "My difficulty," Lunn admitted, "has been to live up to the standards which I contrived with great difficulty to maintain on this occasion!"

On another Australian university campus, Lunn fell into discussion with a group of logical positivists. A basic feature of their philosophy is that all moral judgments are meaningless. Lunn therefore raised the question of Hitler's extermination of the Jews. Was it right or was it wrong? The logical positivists were embarrassed by this challenge, for Lunn was quick to point out that their creed did not allow for a moral condemnation of Hitler's actions. "What finally killed logical positivism," he subsequently observed, "was the fact that every logical positivist was forced to admit some moral judgments were far from meaningless."




Whether in friendly discussion or in formal debate, Lunn exhibited qualities that made him such an impressive advocate: a formidable power of persuasion, an entertaining style of presentation, a captivating sense of humor, an unwavering strength of conviction, and an ingratiating honesty that was ever ready to concede a fair point. Frank Sheed once said that Lunn had a mind like quicksilver, and both his writings and his public performances demonstrate this mental agility, in particular the swiftness with which he could detect the weakness of an argument or an intellectual position.

Visit to America

Lunn flew to America from Australia on the final leg of his world tour. He had been abroad for four months, but seemed unexhausted by the incessancy of the lecture circuit. Despite the whispers of approaching age, the pattern of work that he had pursued for many years—writing books and journal articles, penning book reviews, delivering public lectures, handling correspondence—continued unabated. In his 68th year, for example, he produced two books, edited and wrote about 15,000 words for *The British Ski Year Book* (which he edited, remarkably, from 1919 to 1971), wrote some 75 articles, including a weekly article, and did a three-month lecture tour in America.

Throughout the years, the books on religious themes were interspersed with volumes on skiing and mountaineering. These were, indeed, the two main pursuits of Lunn's life: downhill skiing and uphill Christianity. He received a knighthood in 1952 due to his prowess in the former sphere—"for services to skiing and Anglo-Swiss relations"—and in the same year was made a Citoyen d'honneur of Chamonix, the town in France where he had first put on a pair of skis at the age of ten.

As he reached the Psalmist's span of three score and ten, books of memoirs began to appear. He had written an early autobiography in 1940, *Come What May*, and he now brought out *Memory to Memory* (1956), *And yet so New* (1958), and finally, *Unkilled for so Long* (1968). Each of these works was vintage Lunn—replete with good anecdotes, warm recollections of family and friends, and incisive judgments on the events and trends of our age.




Moral Rearmament

In 1953, Lunn paid the first of many visits to Caux, the Swiss headquarters of the movement known as Moral Rearmament (M.R.A.). For the next three years, he made a systematic investigation of M.R.A., and in 1957 produced *Enigma*, the first book on the movement by an English Catholic. It was widely hailed as an eminently fair account, illustrative of the author's sympathetic interest yet detached outlook. Lunn found much in the movement that did not appeal to him, but he also cheerfully acknowledged its positive achievements, such as the conversion of leading Communists and reconciliation of lapsed Catholics. In particular was he impressed by M.R.A.'s readiness and capacity to cooperate in an alliance against the rampant secularism of the time.

Lunn's own religious background disposed him to such cooperation. Now a Catholic, he was the son of a Methodist father and an Anglican mother. In 1929, he had written a life of John Wesley (1703-91), the founder of Methodism, and the work, which displayed a sympathy allied to critical discernment, was selected as the Protestant Book of the Month in America.

Lunn was deeply impressed by the missionary zeal of Wesley. The conclusion of his book paid tribute to this saying, [John Wesley's] life had all but covered the span of the dying century, and perhaps those who watched the lowering of his body into the empty grave realized in some dim, prophetic fashion that they were present at the burial, not only of a man, but of an epoch. For the old world did not long survive John Wesley. It was 1791, and the "rumble of a distant drum" had already proclaimed the blood-red dawn of revolution. England was to pass unscathed through those troubled years, but the tumbrels might well have been seen in the streets of London, had not a little man in gown and bands taken the world for his parish and changed the hearts of men."

The challenge to continue such apostolic work exercised an irresistible appeal for Lunn—and he thought of the task in ecumenical terms long before it became fashionable to do so. As early as 1940, he was affirming his belief that "the ever-growing peril of militant atheism . . . is forcing Christians to realize the beliefs that unite them are more important than those that divide them." In 1944, he stated, "the co-operation of all who profess and call themselves Christians will be necessary to repel the threat to Christianity."



Thus, he readily welcomed the formation in 1940 of the Sword of the Spirit, an ecumenical movement designed to enlist the cooperation of Christians in resistance against tyranny and in promotion of the social realization of Christian principles. Although the venture proved abortive, it was a model of the kind of movement Lunn felt was desperately needed—a vital and effective alliance between Christians of all denominations in defense of the Christian faith and the Christian moral law.

LAST DAYS

During the 1960's, Lunn himself contributed to such an alliance. As an expression of active ecumenism, he collaborated with an Anglican friend, Garth Lean, in a series of books on contemporary culture. The authors examined, with full documentation, the erosion of Christian belief and morality, and outlined its disastrous social consequences.

“The New Morality”

In 1964, they produced the first critical analysis of what has been called “The New Morality,” a concerted attempt to undermine the foundations of traditional Christian morality, particularly its teaching on sex. “The fundamental weakness of the New Moralists,” averred Lunn and Lean, “is that they . . . appear to think it more compassionate to condone sin than to convince people that, in Christ, can be found the power to conquer it.” The work was so popular that the authors issued an enlarged and up-dated edition in 1967.

In 1965, Lunn and Lean wrote *The Cult of Softness*, which examined the effects of a revolt against objective and absolute standards in the fields of education, theology, literature, the theatre, and television.

They strove to make clear that they were more concerned by the capitulation of mind evident in the tendencies to dilute Christian morality than by the unmistakable signs of self-indulgence. “We are less worried,” they remarked, “by the increase of sexual immorality among the young than by the increase of intellectual immorality among the middle- aged.”


“Intellectual Immorality”

Lunn always regarded “intellectual immorality” as the ultimate form of hypocrisy. He regretted that people did not practice what they preached—himself included—but he thought it far worse when they began to preach what they practiced, adjusting their moral code to fit their behavior rather than the other way round, and rationalizing the absolute demands of Christian morality.

Although ardently keen to spread the Faith, Lunn was never prone to appease those who would not accept it. “Religions are like bees,” he once wrote, “Remove their sting and they die.” He affirmed that Christianity was neither a fashionable nor an easy religion, and as “the contrast between the Christian and secular culture becomes more marked, the Christian is tempted to play down all that still separates him from the secularists, and to seek to conciliate a secular society by identifying himself with fashionable causes.” Lunn, on the other hand, was more interested in converting than in conciliating a secular society, and he strenuously opposed all attempts to tamper with what he called “the Christianity of Christ.”

The common notion that any form of behavior is acceptable if sanctioned by one’s conscience struck Lunn as “very accommodating,” for “it is delightfully easy to obtain a nihil obstat from a properly conditioned conscience. It is too easy to persuade ourselves that we are justified in doing what we want to do. Hence the paramount necessity for objective standards of right and wrong by which we can judge our own behavior.”

In his later year, Lunn found it increasingly difficult to secure opponents with whom to debate. He challenged both Doctor John Robinson (of Honest to God fame) and Canon Rhymes to engage in an exchange of letters on the New Morality, but the debates never



transpired. In 1969, he responded to a public request by the British Humanist Association that dialogue between Christians and Humanists should take place. His initial challenge to the prominent Humanist, the late Sir Julian Huxley, was declined, and even the Association itself was unable to find a candidate. Lunn sharply defined “dialogue” as “a fashionable word for what is hoped will prove a discussion between a skeptic and an intimidated Christian.” He hardly qualified as “an intimidated Christian,” and his conception of “dialogue” as a controversy between a committed Christian and his opponent clearly did not tally with the Humanist Association’s understanding of the word.

In 1969, Lunn produced his final book, *Christian Counter-Attack*, again the fruit of collaboration with Garth Lean. Where *The New Morality* and *The Cult of Softness* had surveyed the dimensions of the assault upon Christian principles, the new work presented positive ways to combat this process and inspire a revival of Christianity.

Lunn believed that, in a culture pervaded by secularism, the prime task for the Christian advocate is to awaken interest in the supernatural. A secularized world neither engenders nor sustains a religious outlook and its citizens gradually cease to be conscious of any spiritual need for Christianity to fulfill. The result is that religious knowledge is assumed to be illusory, incapable of shedding any real light on the great problems that afflict mankind.

To demonstrate the truth and importance of Christianity in such an atmosphere is a formidable challenge. Lunn’s approach was to seek to convince the victims of secularism that supernatural events, which a materialistic philosophy is powerless to explain, have occurred and are still occurring.

In *Christian Counter-Attack*, for example, he produced the latest evidence on extra-sensory perception to show that, in the words of one agnostic, “There is something about the human mind which we cannot explain in exclusively materialistic terms.”

Lunn’s appetite for apologetics remained insatiable, and up to a few weeks before his death he was planning a sequel to *The Cult of Softness*—“to crown,” in the words of his friend, Douglas Woodruff, “40 years of brave and fruitful Christian apologetic.”

The Second Vatican Council was an event that Lunn wholeheartedly welcomed. In particular was he pleased with the Council's ecumenical initiatives, for he had long argued for closer relations among the Christian Churches and active cooperation on common issues. However, the aftermath of the Council caused him considerable disquiet and, as for so many Catholics, the ferment was crystallized in the changes in the liturgy.

Lunn acknowledged that "introduction of the vernacular was undoubtedly beneficial," but he did not agree with the abolition of the Latin liturgy, for he believed it demonstrated the unity and the universality of the Church and reflected the richness of its cultural traditions. When the Latin Mass Society was formed in Britain in 1965, Lunn was elected its first President and he retained this post until 1970, at which time he resigned from the Society in opposition to its growing—and in his judgment futile—insistence that the Tridentine Mass was the only acceptable form of Latin Mass.

The chairman of the Association for Latin Liturgy, Doctor R. Richens, who was intimately involved in the controversy, later declared "in no field of Catholic activity has Sir Arnold himself displayed greater prudence and discretion."

On June 2, 1974, Sir Arnold Lunn died in London at the age of eighty-six. It was fitting, as the editor of the *London Tablet*, Tom Burns, observed, that it should have been on the Feast of Pentecost—"he who had lived with a pentecostal flame within him ever since his conversion."

The mountains had first kindled that flame, and the mountains inspired its most vivid illumination. Lunn reflected on the occasion of his 70th birthday saying, "I have learned to distinguish between the Architect and His creation, but I often wonder in what desert of skepticism I should still be wandering but for the revelation of God in the temporal loveliness of the mountains. The saints are in love with God and they have eyes that can see into heaven, but ordinary folk are grateful for those moments on earth when the clouds of doubt pass and the thinning mists disclose a fugitive glimpse of the 'hid battlements of eternity.'"



PRAYERS OF ARNOLD LUNN

Let me give thanks, dear Lord, in the frailty of age for the beloved mountains of my youth, for the challenge of rock, for the joy of skiing, and for the friends with whom I climbed and skied. Above all, dear Lord, let me give thanks for those moments of revelation when the temporal beauty of the mountains reinforces my faith in the Eternal beauty which is not subject to decay.

As I await the gift of sleep, dear Lord, let me not take for granted the roof above and the pillow below my head.

Arouse my sluggish compassion for the homeless and the destitute and for all Christians suffering for their faith.



Sir Arnold Lunn

NIHIL OBSTAT:
BERNARD O'CONNOR,
Diocesan Censor

IMPRIMATUR:
✠ T. F. LITTLE,
Archbishop of Melbourne
15 September 1975

“A man writes himself down as a hopeless Philistine if he speaks with ignorant contempt of the faith which produced St. Francis, which inspired Dante, and which found expression in the canvases of Bellini and in the stones of Venice. Even if I believed Christianity to be a myth, I should still salute with melancholy respect the superstition which had inspired such supreme artists in song, in paint and in stone, and should still find it difficult to understand how a mere superstition could take form in so noble a synthesis of spiritual and secular beauty.”

- Arnold Lunn, 1932

@WrathOfGnon





This e-book was produced by:

The Seraphim Company, Inc.

8528 KENOSHA DRIVE

COLORADO SPRINGS, CO 80908-5000

WWW.SERVI.ORG